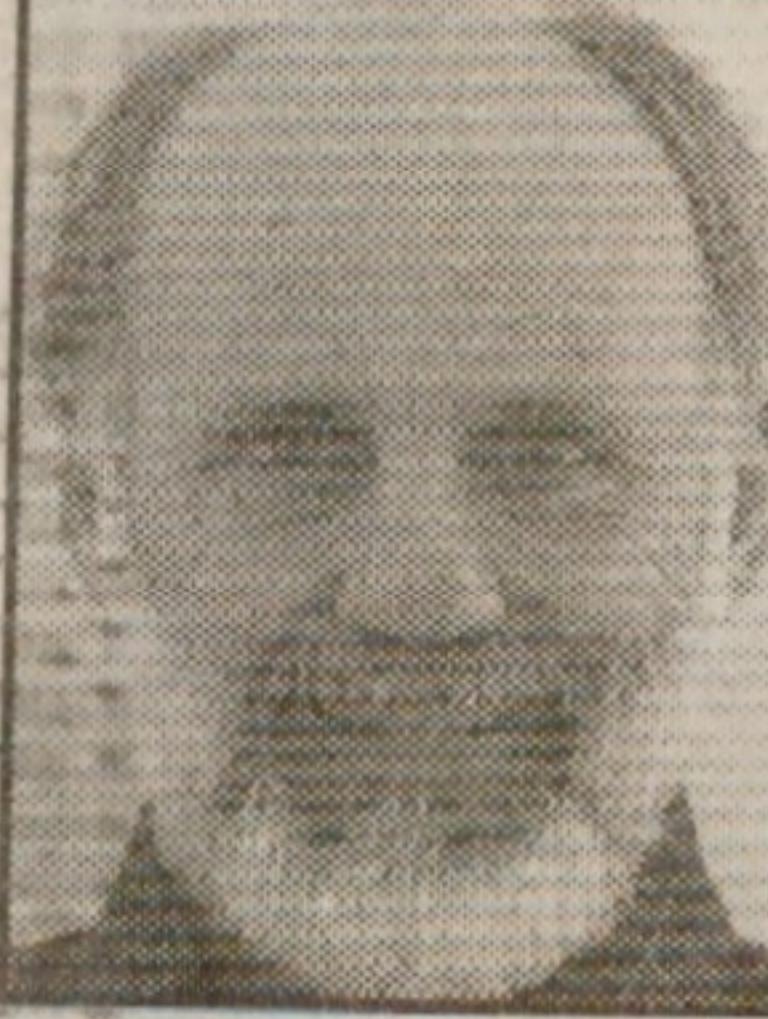


A front seat view of the war

Scanned by

By ANDREW NEMETHY



If there was ever doubt that the travel agent in charge of making the bookings for my life had a perverse sense of humor to go with a bent for adventure, it was dispelled in late fall of 1970. That was when I got orders for Vietnam.

It was not exactly what I had sought — though in hindsight, I suppose I was asking for it. I had put in for orders to spend my last year in the U.S. Navy cruising the Orient as part the Navy's huge sealift operation that was supplying bases (called MSTS). A fellow officer from my ship, the destroyer USS Hawkins (DD-873), had become the head of the small military detachment on a big civilian transport ship. His letters to me were a Siren song of one exotic port-of-call after another: Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore. He spent his days looking at endless Asian sunrises and sunsets, writing poetry (mostly bad), which he sent me, a fellow English major.

That was music to my ears. I had joined the Navy to see the world (and to grow up) but had seen only random bits of the Atlantic coast, and was desperate to get out of Norfolk, Va. — a honky-tonk, asphalt town that sailors aptly called the armpit of the nation, where my ship had been transferred after 18 months in wonderful Newport, R.I.

As a lieutenant j.g., reassignment was possible after the first two years of my three-year commitment after officer candidate school. So I asked for an MSTS transfer. I got it, all right: MSTS Vietnam.

I can still recall first scanning my orders in the officers' wardroom, the ship's burly amiable captain laughing at my orders and my folly, since I could have stayed at my cushy, though boring, job as damage control officer.

Perhaps he was also laughing at my ignorance in not knowing the sealift command had posts in Vietnam.

After a three-week survival course that put me in the best shape of my life, I landed at Saigon's airport on March 20, 1970, staggered by 21 hours on a cramped Boeing 707 and the steamy tropical heat coming through the door. Stepping off the ramp into a blinding mid-day sun, I walked irrevocably from the sheltered life I had known and crossed over an invisible boundary that changed the entire geography of my future.

My assignment turned out to be officer-in-charge of a small Navy shore detachment in Vung Tau, a fairly secure, rundown former French beach resort also known as Cap Saint Jacques, located on the ocean 80 miles south of Saigon at the mouth of the river up to Saigon. The most frequent risk there was not getting shot but getting the "clap," slang for gonorrhea.

But while I wasn't on the front lines of jungle battle, I had a front seat on the Kafkasque, eye-opening behind-the-scenes world of running and supplying the war. In indelible images that are as fresh today as if they happened yesterday, I witnessed the futility of what we were doing, the high cost, and the deceiving it involved of the folks back home.

There was the time, for example, that a base north of me was "Vietnamized," in President Nixon's and Henry Kissinger's highly touted effort to have the Vietnamese take over the war effort. The day after the U.S. turned the small river



Photo courtesy of Andrew Nemethy

Andrew Nemethy served in the Navy during Vietnam. He ran a small shore detachment that supplied the troops.

patrol base over to the Vietnamese, it was stormed — not by the Viet Cong, but by South Vietnamese soldiers. Everything was pilfered, the equipment, the desks, the doors, even light bulbs and hinges and nails. I couldn't blame these dirt-poor people, who had their noses rubbed in massive streams of supplies of materiel and opulent PX's. Knowing their corrupt brass would take what they could get, they took what they could get, down to the lowest soldier.

After that farce in the middle of my tour, I knew the war was lost.

I knew, too, that American GI's were leaving behind a whole generation of half-American children, later known as Amerasians. I wondered if they

would face discrimination. I often wondered, too, if one of them might be mine.

I saw our discomfiting, inadvertent and uneducated cultural imperialism. The young soldiers and career enlisted men I met considered all Vietnamese stupid hopeless "gooks." Never mind that their culture was thousands of years older than ours. To Americans raised on malls and creature comforts and the American way and wartime heroics, the Vietnamese way of being and thinking and fighting was hopelessly backward. Even I marveled at the cultural divide, at how Vietnamese wouldn't sit on a toilet seat but would squat on it, at how goodbye wave meant "come here" for the Vietnamese, or at the way Vietnamese men walked holding hands in an unabashed show of friendship.

But nothing left its imprint more than the odd military niche I found myself in: Supervising some of the 50,000 civilians hired by the U.S. to replace troops brought home under political pressure. My job was overseeing a civilian tugboat operation delivering barges of gravel to the Mekong Delta for pacification roads, the civilian-run military port of Vung Tau, and the shipping lane up to Saigon. That was the official line. Mostly, when I wasn't avoiding ennui by voraciously reading books, I was dispatcher, babysitter, bail bondsman and astounded onlooker on the rambunctious, licentious, hard-drinking, hard-working crew of U.S. and foreign roustabouts and riffraff and stevedores who had come to Vietnam to make big money. I lived with them in (relative) air-

conditioned splendor in a civilian compound that had its own bar and pool tables, striptease shows, maids and maintenance crew. Their names and faces are with me still. "Big John," the cold Swedish mercenary who ran tugboats for me until he went off to make more money waging war for the CIA in Cambodia.

Captain Van DerHoek, the jowly, lascivious Dutch tugboat captain whose bridge always had three or four Vietnamese women running around in negligees, ready to appease his desires. Arnie, the high-stakes pool and poker player from Texas, whose hard, cool squinty eyes measured you in a long weathered face right out of a John Wayne western.

Escaping bad marriages and bad debts and bad life decisions, or just looking for adventure, they were a volatile, pungent mix of scum and salt of the earth. Above the law, neither under U.S. military or Vietnamese jurisdiction, they lived high on the hog, and backed it up with fists and guns. I saw \$1,000 hands in poker games, eight-ball games in billiards for hun-

dreds of bucks. Each day I awoke in my own private movie, half Fellini and half M.A.S.H. and lived a real-life fiction novel, half Conrad's Heart of Darkness and half Catch 22. I saw that even among the most debauched and derelict, there were unspoken codes of honor, acts of kindness and courage. Here, any easy moral certainties slithered away and vanished like the poisonous snakes glimpsed around our compound.

All this was enlivened by an occasional rocket or sapper attack, providing enough of a whiff of danger so that you didn't forget where you were. I came to view Vietnam fatalistically, as a celestial roulette wheel where the odds of dying were ever changing depending on where you were and what you were doing. If your number was up, it was up. Where I slept, the head officers' trailer, had taken a direct rocket hit, killing a previous officer at night (and the Vietnamese where he was shacked up with). I figured lightning and rockets never strike twice in the same place, so I felt pretty secure. I survived two rocket attacks and two sapper attacks, the last a surreal night explosion that destroyed a tugboat and minutes

later segued into a comedic food fight between Thai and Filipino boat crews, who jumped into the water to compete for a monstrous catfish that floated to the surface, stunned from the explosion.

On Jan. 28, 1971, after 10 months, my military tour ended — but not my adventures. Lured by the high pay and a future journalist's (or fool's) adventurous curiosity, I jumped headfirst into the murky life of a tuboater, taking an in-country discharge with plans to travel around the world with all the money I made.

It was three months of fascinating hell, sweating away pounds in a sweltering engine room, amidst drunkenness and debauchery and ocean calm and dangerous rivers in the Mekong Delta and the sonorous thrum of six massive diesels. It was a life I could not have imagined. By April, I had had enough, and left Vietnam for good. Months later, on the glorious Greek isle of Rhodes, madly in love with a Dutch girl and living the Zorba life, I had an epiphany by the azure ocean: I would become a journalist, a teller of tales and the truth. It was where Vietnam had led me, after seeing all the disparity between what the U.S. government was saying and what I saw. Then again, maybe it was the ubiquitous Turkish hashish or the fabulous cheap wine.

I finally, reluctantly, arrived back in the U.S. in Boston after six months abroad, in September of 1971. Call it decompression, call it being at loose ends, after all I had seen and experienced. I was a foot being squeezed into a shoe that had grown too small. A friend's spur-of-the-moment suggestion to become a ski bum lead to a trip to Vermont, and that was how, in December of 1971, I ended up behind the front desk at Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe, and fell in love with the Green Mountains.

A year later, I entered Columbia University to get my master's in journalism, where my thesis was the story of the civilian effort in the war. In 1974, I was hired by the Times Argus, a cub reporter who had seen an eyeful of the world but had never seen a Barre City Council meeting.

I don't think much about Vietnam today, but it's where my life's work began and sank roots, where I first wrestled with life and death, saw the cloudy complexities of evil and morality and the unimaginable variety of humankind. I also learned the simple joy of coming home with all your body parts.

I figure that makes me one of the lucky ones.

Andrew Nemethy is a freelance writer in Adamant and a former reporter and editor for the Times Argus.

Waiting in ambush in the jungle of Vietnam

By VINCE FEENEY

For American GIs there were many Vietnams. The one I knew existed from March 5, 1969, to March 5, 1970. I don't know what Vietnam was like in the days prior to the Tet Offensive in 1968, or after the South Vietnamese army began to replace departing American forces in 1970. They were different Vietnams. I had no direct experience of the fall of South Vietnam in 1975: Like other Americans I watched on TV (from my Bennington apartment) as helicopters lifted the last Americans and a few lucky South Vietnamese off a rooftop in Saigon.

Even during the time I was there, I didn't know the whole country, only a few bits and pieces of steaming jungle in III Corps — a swath of land which ran from the Cambodian border to the South China Sea and included Saigon and the huge military complexes at Bien Hoa and Long Binh. Even within III Corps I spent most of my time in the area northwest of Saigon along the Cambodian border. The Mekong Delta was a place I only heard about, as were the Central Highlands, the old Imperial City of Hue, and the Demilitarized Zone. What I knew were jungles, numerous rubber tree plantations, and the occasional dirt road cutting through the landscape.

My view of Vietnam was further influenced by my duties there. For four months I served as a light weapons infantryman — a "grunt" in the lingo of the day — with Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. The 1st Cav was the classic Vietnam fighting unit, as it was one of the first Army units to incorporate helicopters into its tactics. Possibly no memory of those years for me is as pervasive as the constant, thump, thump, thump, of the rotating blades of a Huey helicopter. We called them "slicks" for the tubular runners on which they landed. Slicks were everywhere.

They delivered us into the jungle, and they were our link to base camp, bringing food, water, mail, and ammunition. They also "extracted" us from the jungle when our mission was over.

Echo Company's mission, like the other four "line" companies in the battalion, was to stop the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) infiltration into South Vietnam from Cambodia. We worked this way. Helicopters brought Echo Company from our base camp to an open site near a trail suspected of being used by the NVA. There we would set up an ambush by stringing a series of Claymore mines along the trail: Claymores were not buried in the ground like conventional mines but sat on short legs above ground, and, when ignited by a hand-held charger, they sprayed dozens of small pellets to the front — a virtual wall of flying shrapnel.

If nothing happened that night, then the next day we might "hump" to another site on the trail 1,000 meters away and set up another ambush. Generally our days were uneventful, as the NVA only moved at night. In the relative safety of daylight, we would sit around and heat up C-rations, write letters home and generally complain about our situation. One constant activity was checking our body for small leeches that clung to us in the dampness of the jungle, or applying medicine to the rashes that continually broke out on our skin.

Most nights were also uneventful — and most of us liked it that way — but every now and then an NVA unit walked into our ambush site. There would be a few quick explosions as Claymores were detonated, then some sharp orders in Vietnamese, and then the rustle of bushes as the NVA detoured off the trail into the deep jungle. With the first light in the morning, a squad of our men would canvass the area, determine if any NVA had been killed, often finding wounded NVA soldiers who had been abandoned during the night. These our medics would patch up and put on the first helicopter back to our base camp.

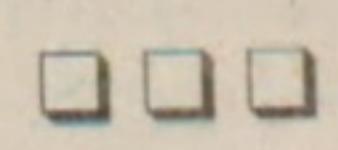
After four months of setting up

ambuses day and night, I got lucky. Back at battalion headquarters the unit supply sergeant had been wounded in a mortar attack; they needed someone to fill-in quickly. My commanding officer recommended me for the job, probably because I was one of the few college graduates in the battalion. My education finally paid off.

The remaining eight months of my tour I was stationed at our battalion headquarters near the town of Quan Loi, about 30 miles from the border with Cambodia. Quan Loi was an old French rubber tree plantation and one could still see the remains of what must have once been an opulent colonial lifestyle: There was a large mansion, which once housed the plantation's French owners, and nearby, an Olympic-size swimming pool. For miles and miles, all one could see were rows upon rows of rubber trees.

At battalion I was in charge of the supply section, making sure our men had enough clothing, weapons and vehicles. Compared to being in the jungle, this was a picnic. I had three hot meals a day, slept in a cot, and could even take a hot shower with water heated in a 55-gallon drum. The only difficult job at Quan Loi was doing guard duty on the perimeter — or green line — at night. Every enlisted man on the base, and there must have been a few hundred of them, drew guard duty about every third night. This consisted of staying up half the night atop one of the bunkers that ringed the base. With our night-vision telescopes, we could see pretty clearly in the dark, and an attack was suspected a constant stream of illuminated mortar rounds kept the night sky as bright as day.

Even though we were periodically mortared at Quan Loi and we turned back one serious night attack by an NVA regiment, once I was stationed there, I was pretty sure I was going to make it home safely — a feeling I never had while out in the jungle.



In March 1970, not only was my tour in Vietnam over, but so was my two-year Army commitment; we returned to California on March 15. I was discharged from the military as a civilian once again. But it was an odd time for me. One of the strongest impressions I have from that time was of being in a war zone one day and 24 hours later nonchalantly walking down San Francisco's Market Street and looking at people oblivious to what was happening in Vietnam. I wanted to shout "Hey, don't you know there's a war going on, and your sons, husbands and neighbors are living and dying in Vietnam?" I couldn't believe life could be so normal in the United States, and so unreal in Vietnam.

I felt another odd sensation a few weeks later when I returned to Vermont and spent some time hiking on the Long Trail near Mount Mansfield. What felt odd was that I was in a forest, which in some ways resembled the jungle; it was quite remote, and damp. But I had no fear. I was 16. For the flash of a moment I felt vulnerable, until I quickly realized that no one was going to shoot at me. Vietnam was thousands of miles away and I was home.

Vince Feeney is a history instructor at the University of Vermont, where he sometimes writes for Seven Days.

Nothin' Scanned by

Perspective

The Sunday Rutland Herald and The Sunday Times Argus

Section C

Classifieds
Letters to the Editor



Photo by David Eastman

Fred Stetson of Burlington was a helicopter pilot for the 175th Aviation Company. A buddy took this photo of a chopper in their company.

Vermonter's Vietnam

In combat or on campus, war touched a generation

Vietnam? It don't mean nothin'

By DENNIS JENSEN
Staff Writer



In Matawan, N.J., my hometown, there is a monument that honors the local men who served in the Vietnam War. While I have never seen

the marker, I am told that it is a fine one, as far as war memorials go.

But a name is missing from the memorial, a veteran who served in a war that for so long so many tried so hard to forget.

How could the townspeople forget one of their own? The war was brutal and unpopular and everyone wanted to forget it, but how could the community overlook one of its veterans?

Today, 25 years after the fall of Saigon, the Vietnam War is a distant memory to older Americans and a mere page of history to the younger generation. But for many of the 3.1 million men and women who served there, the war is much more than a memory or a history lesson. The war actually defined who we were and often determined who we would become.

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It certainly changed my life. There was no way of knowing what was coming. I was 19, a factory worker who graduated in the bottom fifth of my high school class and, as a member of the poor white class, I was meat for the machine.

Sadly, that salient fact is often overlooked in studies about the war. During the war's earliest and bloodiest years, before the lottery draft, this was a class war, fought largely by poor white, black and Hispanic young Americans. That was especially true of the combat units. My outfit, a battery of airborne artillery, consisted of more than 40 percent minorities.

I believe that the war endured for so long because of the class of men who fought and died there. How long would the war have lasted if rich kids, senators' sons and college kids were dying instead of poor whites, ghetto blacks and boys from the barrio?

Anyway, I was drafted in 1966 and at that time, it meant your chances of going to Vietnam were high. Join the paratroopers

and you were practically there.

I didn't care. It wasn't that I wanted to go to 'Nam. But the paratroopers dangled \$55 more in front of me and that was big money back then, almost double my monthly pay.

They shipped us over a week before

Christmas 1967. While I didn't bring high marks home from school, I was no dummy either. I had street smarts, could size things up quickly and knew, only days after arriving in country, that Vietnam was not the place for me.

Like so many other soldiers, all I wanted was to do my time and get home in one piece.

My unit, a part of the Second Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, spent a few weeks at the sprawling and relatively safe base camp at Cu Chi, not far from Saigon. Then the word came down. Only days before the Tet Offensive, we were shipped way north, to Quang Tri Province, where we would set up camp at a remote fire base.

Things changed drastically after we shipped out. While the enemy suffered enormous casualties as a result of the Tet Offensive, they proved that Americans were vulnerable anywhere in Vietnam, even at the American Embassy in Saigon.

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"It don't mean nothin'."

From December 1967 to October 1968, my tour of duty, this was the most oft-repeated phrase you would hear from soldiers in 'Nam.

Whenever something bad happened, when the mail arrived and there was nothing for you, when the rockets and

mortars came in, when LZ Pinky was overrun by the enemy, you'd hear those words:

"It don't mean nothin'." We liked to think of ourselves as tough. And we thought those words made us sound tough.

What we didn't know then, of course, was "It don't mean nothin'" translates into "it means something." For the men who never came home, for the walking wounded and for the soldiers who can never forget, the war, of course, meant everything.

When I came home, I promised myself that for the rest of my life, I would welcome each new day as if it were a gift – a gift to be alive.

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It was a mellow night, or it should have been. Somewhere in the background, beyond the smoke and the beer and the dim lights and the pretty college girls, I heard, for the first time, the strange, magical sound of the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band."

I should have been lost in the evening, and almost was. I was at a college party only weeks after my return home. There was plenty of alcohol and joints were being passed around.

But early in the evening, as college students laughed and drank and made merry, I found myself thinking of my Vietnam buddies, still over there.

How could it be that I was having fun while, halfway around the world, American soldiers were still dying? It was guilt, of course; what the shrinks call survivor's guilt.

I still dream of Vietnam, though not as

Their stories

In this collection of essays, seven Vermonter's recall their experiences of the Vietnam era. The series continues on Pages 5-7.

Inside:

◆ Vince Feeney recalls spending four months setting up night-time booby traps.

◆ Andrew Nemethy had a front-row seat on the Kafkaesque world of supplying the war effort.

◆ Jeff Danziger earned a field commission because he learned Vietnamese, not because he was the best soldier.

◆ Fred Stetson, a helicopter pilot, has found reasons to be grateful for his term in Vietnam.

◆ Dirk Van Susteren witnessed the violence of the protest movement at the University of Wisconsin.

often anymore, and the dream is almost always the same: I am sent to my old unit for a second tour. I am filled with fear and outrage.

The fear comes from the knowledge that I will not survive a second tour of duty. Yet I am outraged by the fact that there are still millions of men my age who never had to go.

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But everything didn't turn out badly.

(See Nothin', Page 5)

Who could see targets from miles offshore?

By STEVEN J. WALLACH

This is the truth about my Vietnam experience as well as I can remember it.

I say that right off because it all happened more than 30 years ago, and besides, no one I know can help with (confirm, dispute or clarify) any of these recollections, never mind the details of actual events.

They seem so ordinary, so out of tune with the passion and action that marked those days. I'd have thought that at the very least the names of my mates (Navy talk) would be etched in memory, and I'm sure I assumed at the time that every adventure and incident of my Navy career would be clear and precise.

What the hell, for instance, was the name of that town in Thailand where we lost two days eating? Why were we in Thailand anyway?

But no. Nothing is clear, nothing certain about my naval experience in the Vietnam era except my dates of service: July 25, 1965, to July 25, 1967; my service number, 915-21-60; and my rating at discharge, third class gunner's mate. The



Photo Courtesy of Dennis Jensen
In country: Dennis Jensen served in the Second Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam.

Nothin'

(Continued from Page 1)

While my tour in Vietnam changed my view of the world and changed my very being, it also changed the direction of my life.

In 1975, I attended my 10th high school reunion. I had left my hometown shortly after the war, and I was out of touch with almost all of my classmates.

My old schoolmates were flabbergasted. They found a man who had changed so profoundly that when it came time to hand out the silly reunion awards, they handed me a mirror.

While the war brought out a darker side of my personality – marked by much anger, an absence of religious faith and a profound sense of loss – I had also gained something. I realized that, as Vietnam had changed me, so too

could I change myself.

I went to college, thanks to the GI bill that came as a result of my two years in the Army, and became, of all things, a writer and editor for a newspaper.

I was also far luckier than many other veterans. So many guys received "Dear John" letters from their girl friends "back in the world." When they got the bad news, the soldiers would be devastated. Some guys went berserk.

But my girl, my high school sweetheart, was there, waiting for me when I came home.

We eventually married and have three wonderful, grown sons. A few months ago, my wife, Kathleen, and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary. She has been my rock.

You want war stories? Mrs. Jensen could tell you a few.

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The enemy came in the night, first with mortars and rockets, then with a ground attack against the small American fire base located in the middle of nowhere in Quang Tri Province, in the north of what was then called South Vietnam.

It was the .50-caliber machine guns, mounted atop armored personnel carriers that did a lot of the damage that night. Some of the enemy soldiers were felled by automatic weapons fire, others from Claymore mines and grenades.

But the big machine guns really chopped the enemy up as they tried to come through the perimeter.

The next morning, a small group of American paratroopers had the onerous task of collecting the bodies of the Viet Cong who tried to kill us the night before. Then, a big bull-

dozer came in, dug a huge hole and the bodies were unceremoniously pushed in and buried.

For this old soldier, a day does not go by without the remembrance of Vietnam and especially the men who served there with me, clearly the best men of my generation.

But I also find myself sometimes thinking of those other men, who we once called the enemy, who were buried there in that unmarked mass grave.

I think of the indignity of their final resting place and of the spirits of the men buried there, with no monument to mark the sacrifice they made while defending their homeland.

I pray for their souls. And for mine.

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To this day, whenever a helicopter flies overhead, I look up and I am taken back ...

I would like to believe that while Vietnam will always be with me (did I say I was so proud to have been a soldier there, while I am saddened by what we did to the people of that country?), I have tried my best to let go of the bad stuff.

But every once in a while the war comes back, to bite me in the ass.

Doug Johnson, a buddy I served with, has cancer; his illness is linked to exposure to Agent Orange. Not too long ago, a man whom I knew personally and whom I suspected as a fraud, claimed to be a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He has since been exposed.

And then there's my old pal, Richie Lewis.

Richie, a Marine and a close friend in high school, was wounded at Dong

Ha, not far from where I served most of my tour. One day, I got the surprise of my life when Richie managed to hitch a ride on an Army helicopter to LZ Sally. That night, we both got stinking drunk on Vietnamese wine.

Every year, without fail, Richie Lewis calls me on Veterans Day.

"You ain't gonna believe it, Den," he says by telephone from his home in Las Vegas a few years back. "They put up a Vietnam War monument in Matawan. They left your name off."

I pondered that for a moment, told my buddy that I was not the least bit surprised and bid him goodbye, wishing him a happy Veterans Day.

And you know what?
It don't mean nothin'.

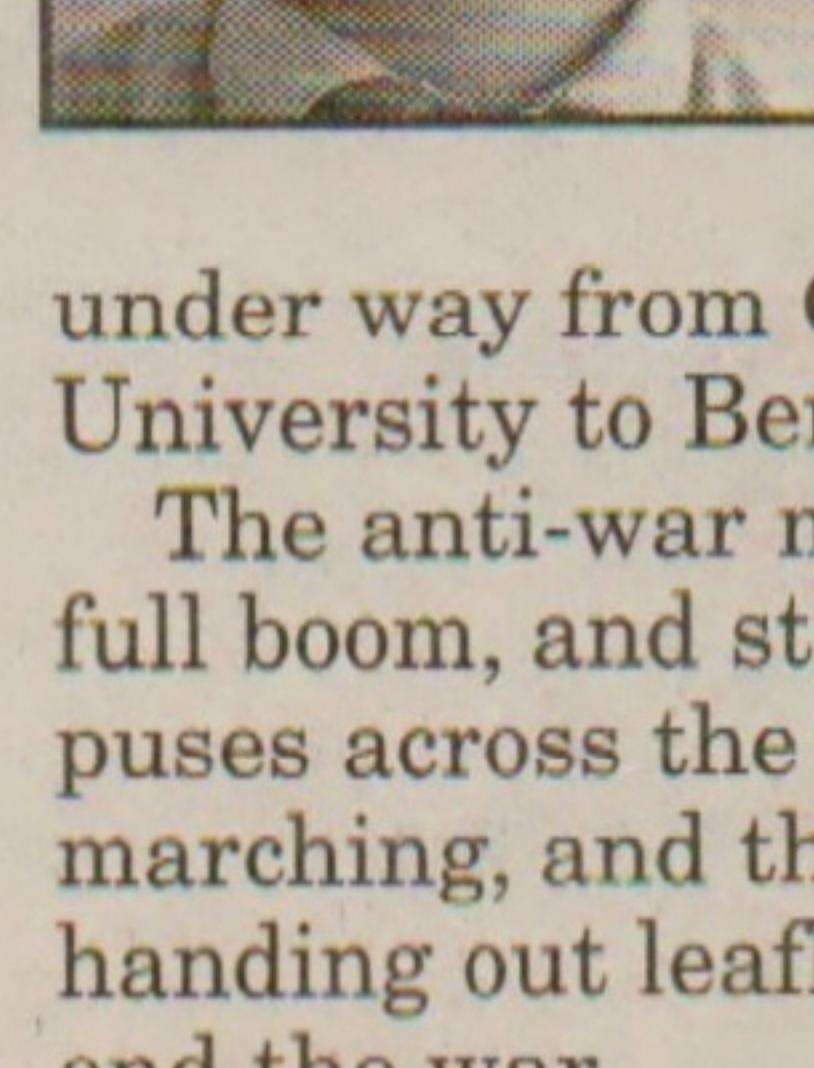
Dennis Jensen is the outdoor editor of the Sunday Rutland Herald and Times Argus.



AP File Photo

A girl screams as she kneels over the body of student Jeffrey Miller at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, when National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of demonstrators. Three other students were killed as well, and nine injured. The shooting led to intensified protests that helped end the war.

War at home: tear gas, Marxism and bombings



By DIRK VAN SUSTEREN

In 1969, as the war raged in Vietnam from the Mekong Delta to the DMZ, a struggle of a different sort was

under way from Columbia University to Berkeley.

The anti-war movement was in full boom, and students at campuses across the country were marching, and throwing rocks and handing out leaflets in an effort to end the war.

I was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the 1960s, a big school with 35,000 students on a tree-lined campus on the shores of Lake Mendota. In my early college years, the elm trees and the stone and brick buildings offered shade and refuge for study; later, they also served as shields from National Guardsmen and as sites for political teach-ins.

Some of the country's most violent student demonstrations occurred at Madison, a school with a long tradition of radicalism and pacifism that included anti-war movements before the two world wars. In the late 1960s, hundreds of students were injured and arrested during violent protests. In August 1970, Sterling Hall, the six-story building that housed the Army Math Research Center, a

Department of Defense program, was bombed and a young graduate student in physics, who had a wife and three children, was killed. Twenty-six other buildings were damaged in the blast.

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I came to the school in the fall of 1964, a privileged teenager with all the advantages of a middle-class upbringing. Like many students from my conservative hometown, I considered myself a Barry Goldwater Republican and actually heard him deliver a campaign speech on the steps of the state's capitol. I left Madison, like many students of my generation, profoundly affected by the war and skeptical, if not cynical, about the government and American foreign policy.

In the fall of 1966, after initially receiving a draft notice, I was given a medical deferment as the result of an old sports injury. The new draft classification arrived at my family's home just before my 19th birthday, and my mother – no supporter of the war – wrapped it in aluminum foil and placed it between layers in a birthday cake. If I was to suffer angst and alienation like many in my generation, I certainly couldn't blame my parents.

Yet the war was always there. Safe at home or stationed overseas, members of our generation were defined by it. I recall the day, after months of soul-searching, that I

finally decided to protest. I took the big step with a march to the capitol, about a mile from campus. Along the way back, some protesters picked up the pace and smashed store windows and damaged cars. The merchants, of course, weren't responsible, but many of us, even those who chose not to be destructive, had come to a cold conclusion that violence to property might help get the government's attention.

After all, smashing things was a time-honored American tradition – from the Tea Party in Boston to the draft riots of the Civil War to 1930s labor unrest. Yet, when it came to violence, I could witness and rationalize it, but not bring myself to inflict it.

With a nod to fashion, I grew my hair longer and sported the domestic uniform of the day: faded T-shirts, ragged blue jeans, sandals in summer, work boots in winter.

Marx, Mao, Che and Cleaver were read widely. I entered the university a young Republican and left mourning the death of Robert Kennedy.

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Memories of events, some small, some big, are vivid:

◆ The teach-ins in smoky classrooms, where impassioned, often boisterous, students debated global politics, French-Indochinese

history and the origins of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

◆ The whoopee for joy around a TV set when President Lyndon Johnson surprised the nation by casually announcing at the end of a speech that he would not seek re-election.

Many of us mistakenly believed his departure would speed the war's end.

◆ The popularity of the history department in this time of confusion and searching. The most interesting class was taught by Harvey Goldberg, who incongruously dressed exquisitely as he delivered a Marxist slant on history to hundreds of us scruffy students and an occasional dog or two.

In his undergraduate courses, Goldberg offered as much narrative as theory, and so we were transported back to the streets of Paris during the French Revolution and onto the ramparts during the European rebellions of 1848. We were exhorted to "exercise our historic imaginations" and, by extension, to be aware of modern-day revolutionary possibilities.

◆ The arrest of hundreds of students at the Commerce Building, when Dow Chemical Corp., maker of napalm, came to recruit students. The protesters, cornered in a hallway during a sit-in, were beaten bloody about the face and shoulders and carted to jail – a public relations disaster for the university because it further radicalized the campus. Of course, the cops over the months had the vilest of verbal insults and the vilest of verbal

◆ The sense of hopelessness in June 1968 when we learned that Kennedy, who ended the war, was

shot dead outside a hotel banquet room as he was celebrating his primary victory in California.

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Gary Bandor, one of my roommates, who came from a small town in northern Wisconsin, was one of those drafted out of college. For some odd reason, perhaps a family emergency, he was allowed home for a rest-and-relaxation stint midway through his Vietnam hitch.

Tough but frank, he confided over a beer one afternoon just how frightened he had been on his first day in Vietnam. Alone in a Quonset hut, he had just showered when he got his first taste of incoming artillery. "There I was buck naked ... I just grabbed my helmet and dove under a table and shook," he recounted. As an afterthought, he added: "You have no idea how unreal this is being in Madison."

It was absurd. In a few days he would be flying back to Vietnam.

What kind of war was this where a kind-hearted 19-year-old would be shooting at Viet Cong one day, then sitting in a bar in the States with a college buddy the next, and then back to the jungle?

Though not big, Bandor had come to the university on a football scholarship and had been in competition for a starting position when he got into academic trouble largely because of the demands of football.

He had started skipping practices, and I remember him ignoring calls from the coach. "Tell him I'm sick," Bandor would say when the phone rang. He knew he was going to Vietnam and probably figured why endure a drill sergeant on the football field when he would soon have to face the real thing.

Just a few years ago, I found some old letters in a desk at home that he had sent while in Vietnam. His notes were simple. "How is it going? Are you still going with Nora? Say hello to (various friends) Hope to be out of this hell-hole soon." Bandor never revealed self-pity or jealousy over the fact he was there and I escaped. Just a determination to survive with body parts intact.

Bandor did survive Vietnam. But not Oklahoma. He was killed in a jeep rollover on an Army base there a week after his return. I once searched for his name on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. It wasn't there, of course, but it should have been.

Vietnam, Oklahoma: It was the same war.

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The us-against-the-establishment mentality was pervasive. In 1969, the campus just dripped pessimism and anger. Students against the war. Against the corporations.

Against racism. Against middle-class values. Against Democrats and Republicans. The campus at Madison and a few other places – such as San Francisco, Berkeley, Cambridge, Ann Arbor, New York City – seemed like cultural island-oases. The rest of the world looked nuts, but we were becoming nuts.

The university campus still teemed with intellectual probing and ferment but also, increasingly, it swirled with political intolerance, drugs, lawlessness, and blather.

With strikes. The liberal arts school was shut down for weeks at a time

as students and professors and staff and campus hangers-on took to the streets. I recall riding back from the student union on a bicycle about 11

one night, when a city cop with a gas mask, who had probably been up for 48 hours, emerged crazily from the darkened street and fired a tear gas gun at me. "You stupid jerk," I yelled as I raced away on my 10-speed, the canister spinning and hissing just a few feet overhead.

"There's an intelligent use of \$25," I remember thinking of the wasted canister.

The war on campus grew even more intense. Police received reports that students were arming in the student ghetto on Mifflin Street; black students, angered by racism, called a strike that brought in the National Guard; burning Dumpsters and tires were a common scene in the streets, and the Army recruitment center was regularly warned of bombings.

Eventually, it subsided. When the war at home became murderous, it subsided.

In May 1970, four students were shot to death by National Guardsmen at Kent State. And then three months later, the Army Math Research Center was bombed, a blast felt 20 miles away. It was also felt in Washington, D.C., where insurrection was putting more pressure on President Nixon to end the war.

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After college and a year of travel I took a job at my hometown newspaper about 100 miles north of Madison. Journalism seemed the perfect compromise: I could witness public events and be paid to be skeptical. I also liked writing. And most important, the reporter's job – being an observer – offered the illusion that in working I wasn't being subsumed by the establishment. I wrote local reaction stories when Nixon made diplomatic overtures to China and when burglars broke into the Watergate. And I was sent back to Madison to cover the riot that occurred when students and street people were denied a permit for a parade and dance on Mifflin Street. First Amendment rights notwithstanding, these rock throwers were now looking extremely juvenile.

The student movement, in fact, was taking its last gasps, and so, mercifully, was U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Then Vermont beckoned.

Horace Greeley, who had once lived in Vermont, advised young men to go west, but I went east on the Great Lakes – largely because I found, for \$1,000, an old, wooden, occasionally leaky sailboat that could serve as my transportation.

At the time, the back-to-the-land movement was drawing thousands of young people to Vermont. They were inspired by the writings of Helen and Scott Nearing, the Whole Earth Catalog, the hippie culture and the state's reputation for tolerance and cheap land. Communes cropped up everywhere.

Vermont, the island-oasis. A place for the Vietnam generation.

They hitched rides and came in psychedelically painted VW bugs and buses. As part of that wave, I arrived on an actual wave.

Dirk Van Susteren is editor of the Sunday Rutland Herald and Times Argus.

With a nod to fashion, I grew my hair longer and sported the domestic uniform of the day: faded T-shirts, ragged blue jeans, sandals in summer, work boots in winter.

history and the origins of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

◆ The whoopee for joy around a TV set when President Lyndon Johnson surprised the nation by casually announcing at the end of a speech that he would not seek re-election.

Many of us mistakenly believed his departure would speed the war's end.

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Part of Herald special section 4-30-2000

To Vietnam, in gratitude



By FRED STETSON

When I think back on my year in Vietnam, I have much to be grateful for. To begin with, I am grateful to Middlebury College. As a student at this liberal arts school, I met faculty and students who looked at life with thoughtful, probing minds. Together, though I didn't know it at the time, they gave me the means to question our involvement in Southeast Asia and to develop a life-long interest in the fragile, yet resilient country known as Vietnam.

In the year I graduated, 1965, Middlebury was not a hot-bed of anti-war activism. Thursday afternoons, an athletic field was covered, not with war protesters or soccer or football players, but green-uniformed young men, some of us with less-than exemplary haircuts, carrying military rifles, and marching about or standing with varying degrees of steadiness and precision.

We all faced the draft and the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) staff convinced many of us that we would do well to enter the Army and serve two or three years as officers. (A year later, 30 of us would be assigned to Vietnam). Between our junior and senior year, we spent a long hot summer at Fort Devens in Massachusetts, where, coincidentally, well-prepared Norwich University cadets helped us through basic training.

For years, I've wanted to track down one Norwich student in particular, Chuck White. He helped me disassemble, clean and reassemble my rifle, he taught me how to make a bed with square corners and a blanket so tight you could bounce a quarter on it. Unfortunately, Chuck did not save me from myself, at least not the morning I ran out to formation with a dab of shaving cream behind my ear. I can still see the look of utter disgust on my sergeant's ruddy Irish face. I think his derisive words were, before ordering me back to the barracks, "Beautiful, Stetson, beautiful."

While parts of Fort Devens I enjoyed –

Was there anything just about my presence, my country's presence, in Vietnam? Where would we be today if we had "won?" Would our sons and daughters, as they are in Korea and Bosnia, be peacekeepers?

appreciated, under-reported stories of this era.

That said, I have a few memories, some bizarre, some poignant.

Soon after arriving at my assigned airfield in Vinh Long, a provincial capital in the Mekong Delta, about 60 miles southwest of Saigon, I witnessed a bizarre incident. A warrant officer, perhaps 18 or 20



Fred Stetson was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. A friend took this photo of members of their company in flight.

Photo by David Eastman

flood back, and I'm hard pressed to decide which really hold meaning, which best illustrates a 23-year-old helicopter pilot's experience in Vietnam. The answer, of course, is that no single incident speaks for my tour. Nor, I would like to emphasize, does it speak for anyone else.

One of my intense dislikes, I've discovered, are those who speak for others. For me, Elaine Henrici McKay, the former wife of one of my Middlebury classmates who served in Vietnam, had a far more interesting perspective on Vietnam than did, say, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Robert McNamara or William Westmoreland. The pain of girlfriends, wives, sisters and mothers who lived through Vietnam is one of the all-time, little-

appreciated, under-reported stories of this era.

That said, I have a few memories, some bizarre, some poignant.

After a year of officer training, airborne school and helicopter school, I arrived in Vietnam where incidents like these were no longer funny. When I sit down to write about those days, many, many memories

years old, was climbing a metal-roofed Quonset hut, armed with a .45 caliber pistol. He wore nothing but his white underwear. He was drunk. What was he doing on that slippery, curving roof? He was trying unsuccessfully to shoot a stray cat.

Then there was the night we received a report of a young girl seriously wounded in a Viet Cong attack on her village. At the time, I was a green, inexperienced co-pilot of a UH-1 helicopter, but my aircraft commander, Lt. Dave Alexander from North Dakota, did an outstanding job of finding that village, landing the aircraft and transporting the girl to a hospital in Saigon. A Special Forces radio operator helped guide us in. The rice paddies and mangrove swamps below were as dark as ink.

I could go on, but I feel whipsawed by these images. Was there anything just about my presence, my country's presence, in Vietnam? Where would we be today if we had "won?" Would our sons and daughters, as they are in Korea and Bosnia, be peacekeepers? Were the anti-war protesters right? Or, did they, by their radical, sometimes violent actions, alienate Americans who, given the chance, might have openly opposed the war as well?

Though I have deep reservations about the war and our country's conduct, I never felt the desire to join in, throw my medals in the street, deface my uniform and march with the protesting masses in Washington. Instead, I returned to Vermont, quietly joined the Vermont Army National Guard and began to work as a reporter for The Burlington Free Press.

Again, I have much to be grateful for. What kept me alive in Vietnam and what kept me safe in the Vermont National Guard were young men who knew how to take care of aircraft. After a day of on-and-off flying – a day that in Vietnam lasted up to 14 hours – pilots retreated to their "hooches" or to makeshift bars. Meanwhile, our crew chiefs began their night's work. Aided by flashlights, they inspected, maintained and repaired our aircraft.

The results were astonishing. I flew 1,200 hours in Vietnam and never once had any serious mechanical problems with my UH-1 HUEY. As good as this maintenance was, in Vermont, at the Vermont Army National Guard, it was even better.

Mechanics and crew chiefs learned a lot in Vietnam. We owe our lives to these men and, nowadays, women.

Yet, during my 23 years of flying, and more recently after I retired from the Guard, I could never quite come to terms with Vietnam. I made fitful, unsuccessful attempts to write a book about a prisoner of war, Donald G. Cook. Off and on, I sent cards to an old Vietnamese girlfriend, who settled with her husband and family in Springfield, Mo. I read book after book about the country and the war, including the vital, little-known Tale of Kieu. I collected stacks of articles. But, instead of peace, I continue to see conflict.

A few years ago, young Americans stormed back to Vietnam, excited about the rich economic prospects in this new "Asian tiger." I looked on with envy. The New York Times Magazine identified some of these charming, fresh-faced "expats," saying they

came from such colleges as Yale, Brown and Middlebury. But, the other day, The Wall Street Journal reported that all is not well, expatriates are returning home, foreign investment in Vietnam has declined precipitously due to in-country red tape and other hostile conditions.

At times, especially when reminded of the country's struggles, I feel remorseful about Vietnam. Why, I wonder, does this country have such a hold on me? At 57, and I still just a naive kid, trying to grow up, still angry or slightly intoxicated by perfume from the Paris of the Orient, Saigon? I'm not sure. Once, a friend told me his experiences with Vietnam and its beautiful women had echoes of a B-grade movie. Is this where I am? In the latter act, the latter scenes of a B-grade movie?

I can't bear the thought.

Well, yes I can.

That's because, in a sense, Vietnam has come to me. Almost 10 years ago, I befriended a Vietnamese family in Burlington, the Trung Mais. They are unfailingly kind and generous; they have seven lovely and delightful children.

And, in a gesture that mends my heart, while suggesting that, after all is said and done, East and West can and do come together, they named their children, Hieu, Thanh, Quoc, Hoa, Hung, My and Nancy.

Fred Stetson, a writer-photographer, served in Vietnam from October 1966 to October 1967. He was a helicopter pilot for the 175th Aviation Company, Vinh Long. He lives in Burlington and is married to sculptor Kate Pond.

Who could see targets from miles offshore?

From Rutland Herald special section on 4-30-2000

By STEVEN J.
WALLACH

This is the truth about my Vietnam experience as well as I can remember it.

I say that right off because it all happened more than 30 years ago, and besides, no one I know can help with (confirm, dispute or clarify) any of these recollections, never mind the details of actual events.

They seem so ordinary, so out of tune with the passion and action that marked those days. I'd have thought that at the very least the names of my mates (Navy talk) would be etched in memory, and I'm sure I assumed at the time that every adventure and incident of my Navy career would be clear and precise.

What the hell, for instance, was the name of that town in Thailand where we lost two days eating? Why were we in Thailand anyway?

But no. Nothing is clear, nothing certain about my naval experience in the Vietnam era except my dates of service: July 25, 1965, to July 25, 1967; my service number, 915-21-60; and my rating at discharge, third class gunner's mate. The



Navy is riveted on details like those, and so were we, almost to the exclusion of everything truly important.

I have left now only general impressions about what amounts to several months spent in the war zone.

I am embarrassed to admit that I can barely remember the names of the men and boys who were my roommates aboard the USS Taylor, DD 468. We ate together, drank gallons of truly filthy shipboard coffee together, washed our white hats together, and slept together in proximity that would cause a riot in most hard-time correctional institutions.

The crowding below decks was bearable only because the Navy is so serious about personal hygiene and individual neatness. No one had dirty laundry spilling out of his meager tin locker, no one stank badly enough for long enough to cause grumbling among the troops and no one had chronically unpolished shoes.

Junior and exceptionally unpopular members of the crew served as bus boys and janitors. They handled the laundry, the mess duties and the sweeping.

Three times a day the boatswain's mate would pipe the ancient call to cleanliness. First the shrill whistle, then the holy words themselves:

(See Offshore, Page 6)

Offshore

(Continued from Page 1)

"Sweepers, sweepers, man your brooms. Give the ship a clean sweep down fore and aft. Sweep down all lower decks, ladders and passageways. Empty all trash over the fantail. Now sweepers." No one could forget that piece of military declamation after hearing it so many hundreds of times.

The experience of actually going to Vietnam, the war zone, had a sense of unreality confirmed on it by the Navy's bureaucratic reference to it as "WestPac." We're not about to steam into the dangerous war the world knows as Vietnam. Nope, we're headed on our WestPac cruise: the benign, but promisingly whore-filled ports of the Western Pacific Ocean, where virginal, crew-cut Midwestern boys and the occasional sharp from Binghamton or Ocala or Enosburg might sample the ancient, endless and famously inexpensive delights of the Orient.

Oh, we'd be in the war zone all right. But for so many sailors, including most of us on those vintage Fletcher-class destroyers, the war as war consisted of lying several miles off shore and lobbing 56-pound artillery shells onto targets too far away to see. We'd whack away in perfect safety at people and things, never fearing righteous retribution, because "the enemy" had no weapons capable of reaching us seven or eight miles distant as we were.

Our bombardment was said to be guided by a voice named Salty Flakes, who we were told was "spotting" our fire from a small plane we could never see. We also

could never see the enemy or wounded persons on either side and felt sorry for the poor grunts ashore who did and who died in awful ways.

Sailors in other wars or on other ships in Vietnam saw what might be described as "action" in the military sense. Even merchant sailors. But no one I knew on the old Taylor considered our participation in the

conflict as anything more than a few extra dollars on payday.

Every day in the war zone (I'm not even sure they called it anything so dramatic) meant hazardous duty pay, and I was never too proud or too ashamed to accept it.

I am now regretful for that, though, as I am for having pronged bullfrogs as a kid and made fun of boys who had been kept back a grade at school.

Only this time I think I might truly have victimized someone. Many persons perhaps. I was in nominal

charge of a 5-inch gun mount. My basic work was to keep it battle ready, my super-visors kept telling me. Hah! On a good day, when my shipmates and my gun were really in the mood to do a lot of damage, we could fire a couple of rounds per minute for several minutes at a stretch without anything going wrong: jammed loading machinery, smushed fingers, burns from hot shell casings or really clumsy sailors from Alabama.

These days, in moments of self-delusion about who and what I was then, I think the chances of having actually hit anything with this bunch of largely decent incompetents on the job was remote. I know we never wanted to.

It's easy now to make light of what we did. But I did and still do have moments of terrible clarity. I remember the first time, after having fired hundreds and hundreds of rounds from inside the gun housing, hearing the process of bombardment from above decks with my buddies doing the firing. It was surprisingly upsetting. It consisted of three parts: the concussion of the powder igniting and the near-immediate clang of the ejected powder casing hitting the deck; the surreal swoosh of the live shell racing away across the water toward its target (or somewhere), and the final faint "poof" of impact.

How much damage could a barely audible "poof" do? Listening from outside was much worse than actually firing the gun yourself.

I took two WestPac cruises. On the second one, when my hitch was nearing its end — getting short, we called it — we heard persistent rumors that the fleet had developed a critical shortage of gunner's mates; that the Atlantic Fleet was refusing to lend the Pacific Fleet any more gunner's mates because their return could not be assured; that the launching of the battleship New Jersey had inhaled all the gunner's mates in the world.

The message was unequivocal: No gunner's mate who could so much as light a match was going to be discharged as long as a tree or monastery was left standing in Southeast Asia. It was distressing to hear. But they thought the better of it and sent me home a month early.

I spent my last several weeks as a fighting sailor polishing linoleum floors in huge empty rooms at First Naval District Headquarters on Summer Street in Boston.

At some point, I just stopped going in. I figured I had polished all the linoleum the Navy had coming.

No one seemed to notice.

Steven J. Wallach is a free-lance writer in Marshfield and the former editor of the Sunday Rutland Herald and Times Argus.

Waiting in ambush in the jungle of Vietnam

By VINCE FEEENEY

For American GIs there were many Vietnams. The one I knew existed from March 5, 1969, to March 5, 1970. I don't know what Vietnam was like in the days prior to the Tet Offensive in 1968, or after the South Vietnamese army began to replace departing American forces in 1970. They were different Vietnams. I had no direct experience of the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. Like other Americans I watched on TV (from my Bennington apartment) as helicopters lifted the last Americans and a few lucky South Vietnamese off a rooftop in Saigon.

Even during the time I was there, I didn't know the whole country, only a few bits and pieces of steaming jungle in III Corps — a swath of land which ran from the Cambodian border to the South China Sea and included Saigon and the huge military complexes at Bien Hoa and Long Binh. Even within III Corps I spent most of my time in the area northwest of Saigon along the Cambodian border. The Mekong Delta was a place I only heard about, as were the Central Highlands, the old Imperial City of Hue, and the Demilitarized Zone. What I knew were jungles, numerous rubber tree plantations, and the occasional dirt road cutting through the landscape.

My view of Vietnam was further influenced by my duties there. For four months I served as a light weapons infantryman — a "grunt" in the lingo of the day — with Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. The 1st Cav was the classic Vietnam fighting unit, as it was one of the first Army units to incorporate helicopters into its tactics. Possibly no memory of those years for me is as pervasive as the constant, thump, thump, thump, of the rotating blades of a Huey helicopter. We called them "slicks" for the tubular runners on which they landed. Slicks were everywhere. They delivered us into the jungle, and they were our link to base camp, bringing food, water, mail, and ammunition. They also "extracted" us from the jungle when our mission was over.

Echo Company's mission, like the other four "line" companies in the battalion, was to stop the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) infiltration into South Vietnam from Cambodia. We worked this way. Helicopters brought Echo Company from our base camp to an open site near a trail suspected of being used by the NVA. There we would set up an ambush by stringing a series of Claymore mines along the trail: Claymores were not buried in the ground like conventional mines but sat on short legs above ground, and, when ignited by a hand-held charger, they sprayed dozens of small pellets to the front — a virtual wall of flying shrapnel.

If nothing happened that night, then the next day we might "hump" to another site on the trail 1,000 meters away and set up another ambush. Generally our days were uneventful, as the NVA only moved at night. In the relative safety of daylight, we would sit around and heat up C-rations, write letters home and generally complain about our situation. One constant activity was checking our body for small leeches that clung to us in the dampness of the jungle, or applying medicine to the rashes that continually broke out on our skin.

Most nights were also uneventful — and most of us liked it that way — but every now and then an NVA unit walked into our ambush site. There would be a few quick explosions as Claymores were detonated, then some sharp orders in Vietnamese, and then the rustle of bushes as the NVA detoured off the trail into the deep jungle. With the first light in the morning, a squad of our men would canvass the area, determine if any NVA had been killed, often finding wounded NVA soldiers who had been abandoned during the night. These our medics would patch up and put on the first helicopter back to our base camp.

After four months of setting up

There would be a few quick explosions as Claymores detonated, then sharp orders in Vietnamese, and then the rustle of bushes as North Vietnamese soldiers detoured into the deep jungle.

ambushes day and night, I got lucky. Back at battalion headquarters the unit supply sergeant had been wounded in a mortar attack; they needed someone to fill-in quickly. My commanding officer recommended me for the job, probably because I was one of the few college graduates in the battalion. My education finally paid off.

The remaining eight months of my tour I was stationed at our battalion headquarters near the town of Quan Loi, about 30 miles from the border with Cambodia. Quan Loi was an old French rubber tree plantation and one could still see the remains of what must have once been an opulent colonial lifestyle: There was a large mansion, which once housed the plantation's French owners, and nearby, an Olympic-size swimming pool. For miles and miles, all one could see were rows upon rows of rubber trees.

At battalion I was in charge of the supply section, making sure our men had enough clothing, weapons and vehicles. Compared to being in the jungle, this was a picnic. I had three hot meals a day, slept in a cot, and could even take a hot shower with water heated in a 55-gallon drum. The only difficult job at Quan Loi was doing guard duty on the perimeter — or green line — at night. Every enlisted man on the base, and there must have been a few hundred of us, drew guard duty about every third night. This consisted of staying up half the night atop one of the bunkers that ringed the base. With our night-vision telescopes, we could see pretty clearly in the dark, and if an attack was suspected a constant stream of illuminated mortar rounds kept the night sky as bright as day.

Even though we were periodically mortared at Quan Loi and we turned back one serious night attack by an NVA regiment, once I was stationed there, I was pretty sure I was going to make it home safely — a feeling I never had while out in the jungle.



In March 1970, not only was my tour in Vietnam over, but so was my two-year Army commitment; when I returned to California on March 5, I was discharged from the military, a civilian once again. But it was an odd time for me. One of the strongest impressions I have from that time was of being in a war zone one day, and 24 hours later nonchalantly walking down San Francisco's Market Street and looking at people oblivious to what was happening in Vietnam. I wanted to shout "Hey, don't you know there's a war going on, and your sons, husbands and neighbors are living and dying in Vietnam?" I couldn't believe life could be so normal in the United States, and so unreal in Vietnam.

I felt another odd sensation a few weeks later when I returned to Vermont and spent some time hiking on the Long Trail near Mount Mansfield. What felt odd was that I was in a forest, which in some ways resembled the jungle: it was quiet, remote, and damp. But I had no M-16. For the flash of a moment I felt vulnerable, until I quickly realized that no one was going to shoot at me. Vietnam was thousands of miles away and I was home.

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